



EMPOWERING THE MI'KMAQ OF PEI

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NI'N AQ NO'KMAQ PROCESS

The Ni'n aq No'kmaq process, which translates to “Me and My Relations,” serves as a transformative initiative for the Mi'kmaq of PEI. It enables us to decide who can exercise Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Epekwitk (PEI). This process represents a major step towards self-determination. The benefits obtained from this process are multifaceted, impacting governance, cultural identity, and community cohesion.

At the core of the Ni'n aq No'kmaq process lies the principle of self-determination. When we talk about “self-determination,” we are talking about the rights of a group of people to make their own choices about their future. It is about a nation or group of people being able to decide how to govern themselves, manage their lands and resources, and protect their cultural practices, all without interference from outside forces. For the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq – the Mi'kmaq of PEI – this means having the power to control our lives and communities in a way that reflects our values and traditions, rather than being forced to follow systems imposed by colonial powers.

Self-determination is intricately connected to the idea of nationhood. For Indigenous Peoples, it is about the ability of each nation to exist independently, with its own set of laws, governance structures, and decision-making processes. This independence provides an opportunity to shape a future that not only respects and honors our shared history but also fosters and reinforces our unique cultural identities. In this sense, self-determination is not just about survival—it is about restoring a sense of balance and correcting historical injustices. It allows Indigenous Peoples to heal and grow in a way that honours our histories and ensures our rights are protected for future generations.

Ni'n aq No'kmaq helps clear away the fog around who has the right to exercise Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Epekwitk, empowering us to assert these rights on our own terms. It determines who holds these rights. Legal scholar John Borrows emphasizes the importance of recognizing Indigenous nation's ability to exercise and define their rights as a means of justice and reconciliation. Establishing who can exercise our Aboriginal and Treaty rights will provide clarity, while also enabling the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq to advocate effectively for our interests.

Cultural revitalization is another key benefit of Ni'n aq No'kmaq. This initiative promotes community engagement and education while emphasizing the importance of cultural practices, traditions, language, and knowledge by incorporating traditions around family, kinship, community, and relationship into the process itself. By doing so, we can help youth today feel a sense of connection with their culture and be proud of where they come from. Our communities and families have been negatively impacted by colonial practices like residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. This work reacts against those policies. These policies were designed to systemically dismantle Indigenous cultures and identities, and Residential Schools were created with the intent to assimilate us into Euro-Canadian Society, creating a legacy of trauma that continues to affect our communities today. Similarly, the impact from the Sixties Scoop led to a significant gap in cultural knowledge and identity for those affected which further caused a disconnection from our culture, our teachings, and our practices that are vital to our nationhood. This work reacts against those

policies by actively promoting cultural revitalization. We are working to heal the wounds inflicted by colonial policies. This work is not just about who can exercise Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Epekwitk, it is also about restoring a sense of nationhood and belonging that was deliberately undermined by the governments. It fosters resilience and reinforces the importance of cultural continuity, ensuring that our children today, and our future generations have the tools and knowledge to navigate their futures confidently. It demonstrates our resilience and ensures that future generations grow up knowing and practicing our culture and traditions.

Another key part of the Ni'n aq No'kmaq process is our ability to manage natural resources. This means we get to create our own rules for how to look after the land, fisheries, and wildlife. By doing this, we can make sure these resources are used wisely and in ways that reflect our cultural traditions. When we have the power to govern ourselves, it opens up opportunities for us to adopt practices that are better for the environment and stay true to our roots. This self-determination enables us to taking care of the Earth and honor our heritage. In the end, it is about creating a sustainable future that respects both nature and the rich traditions we have as Mi'kmaw people.

Establishing a clear process for identifying beneficiaries and who can exercise rights as a Mi'kmaw rights holder in Epekwitk will lead to stronger governance structures within our Mi'kmaw communities. Our process involves seeking direction from the community, listening to concerns and hearing what is important to you. It requires us to work together as an island, as a district, as well as work with the other parts of Mi'kma'ki. It stitches the nation back together which enhances accountability and transparency. As governance scholar Graham Smith explains, in order for an Indigenous governing model to be a success it must correspond with the values and principles of that particular group. This is consistent with the Ni'n aq No'kmaq process which emphasizes community engagement and

direction. By creating governance structures that are reflective of Mi'kmaw values and traditions in Epekwitk, we can enhance our political autonomy and ensure that leadership is accountable to our community.


This process lays the foundation for consistent long-term sustainability. By creating a model of self-determination for the Mi'kmaq of PEI, we can plan for the future to ensure that our nation and resources remain viable for generations to come. Winona LaDuke, a powerful voice for environmental sustainability, emphasizes on the importance of Indigenous stewardship to maintain ecological health and resilience. For us, this aligns closely with the principle of NETUKULIMK—taking only what is needed while ensuring the sustainability of resources for future generations. Rooted in traditional knowledge, such practices empower us to navigate environmental challenges and adapt to changing conditions.

Finally, through the Ni'n aq No'kmaq process, we can integrate these principles into our governance and management strategies in Epekwitk. This represents a transformational opportunity for the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq. We are taking our rights back while promoting self-determination amongst our Mi'kmaw nation – paving a path for the future, that remains true to who we are, building up community capacity and strength. What underlines this process as key to the ongoing journey to self-determination is that it has multifaceted benefits ranging from cultural revitalization and strengthened governance to improved relationships with external entities. As we continue along this path, the impacts of the Ni'n aq No'kmaq process will resonate throughout our nation, paving the way for a vibrant and sustainable future for generations to come.

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